

Upskilling Pacific Police Officers

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Introduction

Police officers in any country are at the forefront of law enforcement and are supposedly advocates of social justice. This is the service that they are tasked to perform. Pacific police officers receive basic training in their respective Police Academies. The training programme is normally completed within 16 weeks and the new recruits are then posted out into the field.

The basic recruit programme prepares them to perform the basic task of policing but does not equip them with an in-depth appreciation of the more encompassing roles of upkeepers of the law. Many Pacific police officers still practice reactive policing. The reactive policing approach gives rise to enmity between the Pacific police organisations and the communities which they purport to serve. In the Pacific there is a long standing spirit of animosity between the community and their police organisations.

Realising the inadequacy of Pacific police officers the Pacific Regional Policing Initiative (PRPI) sought to support the region's efforts to build the capacity of Pacific police officers, fight crime and corruption through the establishment of a 'Virtual Academy' that will coordinate and deliver training to police across the Pacific. It developed protocols for police work and high level training materials for Executive Management Programmes which were then designed and delivered by the University of the South Pacific (USP). For the last few years the approved content was delivered at the Certificate, Diploma and Degree levels are currently delivered throughout the USP region as well as non-USP regions such as Papua New Guinea and the Federated States of Micronesia.

PRPI had identified a series of common critical issues requiring capacity building including executive leadership, strategic planning, policy development, investigative practices, basic police competencies and forensics capabilities. The current ODL materials address these issues in the attempt to upskill Pacific police officers.

It is essential for police officers in the Pacific region to be upskilled because in today's changing face of crimes, the officers need to be able to equip themselves with knowledge and skills so that they truly serve and protect the communities they have sworn to serve. However if they do not progress beyond the training they received during basic recruit then they are left wanting in their role as keepers and protectors of the law in their communities. This paper has attempted to highlight three main reasons why Pacific police officers should upskill themselves.

Upskilling of police officers is crucial as it will boost their confidence to serve their communities better because they are better equipped to assist their communities. In Fiji for example, following the *Koban* concept of Japan, police posts were established in various parts of the country. An observation made about the *Koban* is that they are certainly not staffed by the elite of Japan's police force, more often elderly or young officers. Female officers are not usually seen in koban outside Tokyo and do not do the night shift. (<http://www.japanvisitor.com/index.php?cID=359&pID=1346>)

The same can be said of police posts in Fiji as most of them are manned by special constables, most of whom are untrained. This causes a lot of frustration for the members of the community because they feel that they are not served adequately because the officers are untrained. It becomes a challenge for officers too, to serve in communities where the citizenry is very well educated such as the community served by the Suva South Police Post for instance. The same is applicable to some of the police stations as well. The Fiji experience is that the citizenry generally is better educated than the police officers and so some these officers often exercise their power in ways that reflects negatively on them. There is always the tension between the educated public and the less-educated police officers who exercise their responsibilities using force. To avoid the use of “unreasonable force” the challenge is to build the confidence of the police officers so that they are able to serve their respective communities well. They need to have their knowledge broadened and skills upgraded. One of the courses in the Pacific Policing programme at USP is Ethical Dimensions in Policing. This course “explores the nuances of public policing in a democracy. The ideas of the public sector, justice, democracy, the state and pluralism are closely examined. The main five schools of ethical reasoning are discussed and ethical reasoning is contrasted to legal, cultural and theological reasoning. The distinction between ethics and moral is explored as will police codes of conduct, mechanisms for internal oversight and investigation and the responsibilities of supervisors and managers in the maintenance of community confidence. Strategies for the monitoring of standards of performance and behaviour and effective response to public complaints is also examined.” (Wall, 2006: iv) Equipping the officers with this knowledge allows them to have the confidence to be able to handle the public more professionally.

Knowing the origins of their organisation also gives them the opportunity to see where they fit into the bigger picture of policing in the world. Many of the Pacific islands were colonized by the British Empire. The policing that was introduced into the Pacific by the British followed the Irish Constabulary model and this is the basis of most Pacific Islands police agencies. Furnished with this knowledge encourages the officers because they are now aware of their origins and why there are certain practices that are part of their organisation. It gives them a better understanding of why they do things the way they do.

As part of a growing family of security providers, Pacific island police organisations are called upon to send officers to be part of peacekeeping forces. “The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a partnership between the people and Government of Solomon Islands and fifteen contributing countries of the Pacific region. RAMSI is helping the Solomon Islands to lay the foundations for long-term stability, security and prosperity – through support for improved law, justice and security; for more effective, accountable and democratic government; for stronger, broad-based economic growth; and for enhanced service delivery.” These 15 countries include: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea Samoa Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. (<http://www.ramsi.org/>). The Fiji Police Force over the years has also become involved in UN Missions. “Going on Missions is not an easy task, as this means taking their post overseas in unfriendly environment. Members of the Fiji Police have served in war torn countries such as Sudan, Kosovo, Iraq, Darfur, Cambodia and Liberia and are also being considered for highly volatile places like East Timor and Haiti.”

(http://www.police.gov.fj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114:officers-pass-un-test-&catid=45:overseas-missions&Itemid=86).

For Fiji officers to adapt ably to their new service environment it is crucial that they hone their skills and expand their knowledge. They are removed from their naturally safe environment and thrust into surroundings which are ‘foreign’ and could be resentful of them. The normal support mechanisms are not readily available to them. So the training that they receive must prepare them to be able to function in a ‘foreign’ environment. Thus it is imperative that police officers are upskilled otherwise they are prone to fail and can be obstacles to peacekeeping missions.

For officers to continue to improve, they need to be able to reflect on their practice. This means upskilling them to be good action researchers. If they are unable to mull over on their practices and arrive at ways to improve them, then they will maintain their status quo resulting in continued tension between the police and the public as well as using outdated practices which are redundant in the fight against today’s

changing face of crime. "The world of crime continues to change rapidly so Pacific police officers need to learn to conduct research into their practices so that they are able to confront the highly sophisticated criminal world that they are now expected to operate in. Action research, it is argued, has particular relevance to the professional policing because it presents practitioners with a cyclical process of progress through successive steps of change and understanding. Action research is an iterative process and is usually based on a heuristic, or way of looking at a problem and directing your attention, such as plan – act – observe – reflect, or the problem orientated policing sequence of scan – analyse – respond – assess." (Barnsley et.al, 2006: iv)

This is why it is very important to upskill police officers so that the basics that they learned in their police academies are broadened so that they have a greater understanding of their role and appreciate what is involved as upkeepers of the law.

PRPI had identified a series of common critical issues requiring capacity building including executive leadership, strategic planning, policy development, investigative practices, basic police competencies and forensics capabilities. The array of courses which make up the Pacific Policing programme major include:

- LW110: Law and Society
- LW111: Courts and Dispute Resolutions
- UU100: Communications and Information Literacy
- UU114: English for Academic Purposes
- MG101: Introduction to Management
- MG201: Organisational Behaviour
- PL101: Pacific Government and Politics
- PP101: Contemporary Issues in Pacific Policing
- PP201: Comparative and International Policing
- PP202: Police and Society in the Pacific
- PP300: Action Research in a Police Context
- PP301: Police Leadership and Command Management
- PP302: Ethical Dimensions in Policing
- PS101: Introduction of Psychology
- SO100: Comparative and International

The proposed courses to be part of the programme were selected from disciplines which complement the work of the police. Besides enforcing the law, police officers are expected to be many things to many people too. They are expected to be counselors, law enforcers, social service providers, and managers among other things. The range of courses that are part of the Policing programme, therefore, accounts for what the varied roles of police officers are in the 21st century. Their work is no longer confined only to maintaining the law and solving crimes.

Conclusion

Like any other profession, there is a continued need for the police organisations in the Pacific to upskill their officers. As noted earlier, many officers in the region enter the basic recruit programme with minimal qualifications and what they go through during their basic recruit is sufficient to get them to have a taste of police work. However that is not sufficient and the PRPI in dealing with police agencies in the region realized the dire need to have Pacific police offices upskilled so that they are able to confront the different types of crimes that they will face in today's rapidly changing world. A number of Pacific police officers have successfully completed the programme and there is now an increase in the interest shown in this programme because of the expertise that the successful officers are now providing to their police agencies. It is envisaged that more will take the initiative to enroll in the programme so that they can offer be upskilled and offer service to their communities.

Reference

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